



Elsie's Thanksgiving Kiss

On the eve of Thanksgiving, the chilly November afternoon was quickly turning into early twilight. The once lush trees, now stark and leafless, swayed and creaked in the brisk wind, their icy branches clashing with a sound far removed from the gentle rustle of summer leaves. Scattered leaves, once vibrant with life, were now being tossed about like wanderers without a home, finding temporary shelter before being whisked away by the relentless wind. The streets of the village were almost empty, with only a few hurried souls braving the cold, their clothes fluttering and heads bowed against the sharp, biting air.

But inside Mrs. Alford's cozy parlor, the bleakness of November was nowhere to be found. Though typically reserved for special occasions, the parlor was anything but stiff and formal. Elegantly furnished and infused with the warmth and liveliness of the house, it was a welcoming haven from the harshness outside.

In this inviting room sat Elsie Alford, the youngest of the family, a mere seventeen years old but still very much a child at heart. With her playful innocence and the gentle, yet resilient nature of a windflower, Elsie embodied the perfect blend of childhood and emerging womanhood. Being the youngest, she was the family's darling, affectionately called "little Sis" or the "child." And while she was doted on, it was a nurturing kind of affection that only made her bloom brighter, grounded in the principles of love and truth.

On this particular day, Elsie's excitement was palpable. Her brother, a young theology student and her favorite sibling, was coming home for Thanksgiving after several months away. She couldn't wait to envelop him in a hug and a kiss, the very thought of it making her heart dance with joy.

In the midst of her excited waiting, Elsie's mother needed her help in the kitchen. Mrs. Alford was busy preparing for a traditional New England Thanksgiving, knowing well that a feast of love and gratitude was just as important as the emotional warmth of the day. When Elsie returned to her watch at the window, she caught a glimpse of what she thought was her brother's gray coat approaching the house.

As the doorbell was about to ring, Elsie flung open the door and leaped into the arms of a tall, serious-looking stranger, mistaking him for her brother. In her eagerness, she planted a kiss on his lips, a kiss meant for her sibling. The stranger's shocked expression made Elsie realize her mistake. She pulled back, her face a mixture of horror and embarrassment. Just then, her actual brother called out from the path, teasing her about her impulsive welcome. Flustered and red-faced, Elsie ran into his arms, seeking refuge from her embarrassing blunder.

The stranger, Mr. Stanhope, was a classmate of her brother's and had come to call on a matter of business. He too was flustered and embarrassed, intending to leave immediately to avoid further awkwardness. But George, Elsie's brother, insisted he stay, excited about the funny mix-up and seeing it as an opportunity for endless amusement. Despite her protests, Elsie's parents warmly welcomed Mr. Stanhope, misunderstanding the situation as a friendly visit planned by George.

Elsie, usually lively and playful, became unusually reserved and formal in Mr. Stanhope's presence, determined not to give him any further cause to think poorly of her. Yet, despite her efforts, she couldn't help but feel intrigued and somewhat sympathetic towards the quiet, thoughtful young man.

The next day, as the family, now joined by other relatives, sat down to a bountiful Thanksgiving dinner, Elsie's uncharacteristic solemnity puzzled everyone. Her father even jokingly questioned if she had suddenly matured overnight, but Elsie could only think about her embarrassing encounter from the evening before. However, Mr. Stanhope's surprising wit and charm slowly chipped away at her resolve, and she found herself warming up to him.

In the evening, filled with music and laughter, Elsie let her guard down. She sang beautifully, her voice harmonizing perfectly with Mr. Stanhope's. The hours flew by, and it was clear that a special connection was forming between them.

The following morning, Mr. Stanhope prepared to leave, but not without expressing his regret to Elsie for any discomfort he might have caused. In a moment of honesty and vulnerability, Elsie asked him to return for Thanksgiving the following year, giving her a chance to make amends for her behavior. He accepted, and as he left, a new friendship, with the promise of something more, began to blossom between them.

Over the next year, Elsie and Mr. Stanhope grew closer, exchanging letters and visits. When Thanksgiving came around again, Elsie eagerly awaited his return, determined to show him the true warmth and hospitality of her family.

On this Thanksgiving,

unlike the last, Elsie greeted Mr. Stanhope not as a stranger, but as a dear friend. The day was filled with joy, laughter, and a special warmth between them. As they walked together, sharing stories and

laughter, it was clear that their friendship had deepened into something much more profound.

Elsie's Thanksgiving transformation was complete. From the impulsive, playful child, she had grown into a thoughtful, caring young woman, ready to embrace the love and happiness that life had in store for her.